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Monolingualism, the Bane of This Country.

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Most of the opposition in this country to a thorough and extensive study of modern foreign languages emanates from a misconception of the word, Americanize. To the average Anglo-American it is synonymous with a Circean form of Anglicizing or Hibernicizing foreigners coming to our shores. Let us attempt a broader definition: Americanization is a gradual assimilating process allowing each constituent part of our heterogeneous population ample time and opportunity to contribute its share of what is typically strong and good. In no other manner can our social life receive that versatility and richness of content so indispensable to a nation's happiness.

The coming of the Germans to America, to cite the most representative case, has much in common with the transplanting of a tree. If it is to flourish in other environments, its primary root must remain intact, the contiguous earth should be retained, nor should the new soil differ much from the old. Their language is to the Germans, what the primary root is to the tree. Sever it, and they are prematurely blighted. Whatever vegetation remains, is as the mistletoe to the oak or as the sucker to the fruit-tree. Their time-honored customs and traditions are to them as the original earth which has been left adhering to the roots of the newly transplanted tree and through which alone its sustenance can be properly conveyed. Lastly, they thrive best in a rather meagre soil. When placed in too fertile a loam, they develop luxuriant foliage, but cease to bear fruit. The criminal indifference with which our wealthy Germans look upon the sublime mission of their countrymen in our republic is a heartrending illustration of this fact.

To foster his language and song, to cling to his national customs and traditions with every tendril of his soul, is the most sacred duty devolving upon the German-American. In performing it, he will not only transmit to the American nation its legitimate inheritance from the fatherland, but will also develop his own faculties to their fullest extent, thereby becoming a more versatile and more useful member of society.

By breaking with his own past, in order to become Anglicized, he would lose his ethnical characteristics, without, however assuming another nationality. For civilizations, such as the English and the German, are the products of centuries, and it is a fatal error to imagine that they can be exchanged at will like articles of wearing apparel.

The scarcely landed foreigner who shouts himself hoarse in praise of the American flag and maligns his native land is a superficial, fickle-minded person, upon whom we could place no reliance in time of national peril. The German by birth or descent who has cast aside the precious heritage of his great language and literature is a rudderless ship on an unknown sea. He is left without a past and without a people. He is neither English nor German, but only a hideous mixture of the baser elements of both. Though he be self-sustaining, though he may add to our material prosperity, he is nevertheless a pauper and a parasite feeding upon the very heart-blood of our nation. Were it not for his deplorable ignorance, he would have to be branded as a traitor even more culpable than Benedict Arnold.

I am far from underrating the invaluable benefits which we have derived from England. No blame attaches to her, for she has done more than her duty by us. But the composite nature of the American people makes it imperative that other forces beside those of English origin should become more than nominally operative in our national organism.

While the Revolutionary War gave this country its political autonomy, the overwhelming predominance of the English language caused it to remain a British dependency from a social and intellectual point of view. With the increasing immigration from Europe this state of dependence became ever more incongruous and detrimental. What a magnificent legacy was never claimed by us, because our English eyes could not behold it! What a Gospel of European culture was preached in vain to us, because our English ears were deaf to it! Myriads of seeds fraught with untold blessings, pregnant with the possibilities of a rich and re-plendent vegetation, are being wafted to us year after year across the Atlantic; yet they cannot take root in our shallow monolingual soil.

Monolingualism has been our greatest curse! By suppressing our latent powers, it has retarded our intellectual growth and has impoverished our social life. It has made a desert of what might have been a paradise. It has robbed this nation of its soul!

Nor will the dawn of a brighter era appear, until Americans learn to comprehend and to put in practice the message which the non-English literatures contain for them.

The first step in this direction will consist in enabling our youth, not merely in a few large cities, but all over the land, to begin a second representative modern language at such an early age that they may become imbued with its literary spirit and may make its masterpieces part of their own flesh and blood. The prevailing custom of beginning all foreign languages in our secondary schools is based upon the irrational assumption that knowledge can be compressed and cut and piled up indiscriminately like so many bales of hay. Under this arrangement the time

devoted to modern language study is so short and the number of participants so limited that it can be nothing else than an imaginary quantity in our public education.

The more languages we master, the broader our horizon, the keener our vision becomes. It is a fallacy to suppose, that we can absorb the European literatures through English translations, lectures and book — reviews. No more than all the waters of the Baltic and the German Ocean can enter the Atlantic through the English Channel, no more does the English language suffice to convey to the American people their intellectual and social heritage from the continent of Europe. Moreover, Anglo-American literary criticism of to-day resembles a river with countless shoals and gorges, where many a vessel bearing a cargo of inestimable value is stranded on the sand-banks of dilettanteism or is dashed to pieces in the narrows of frenzied racial prejudice, erroneously called patriotism. The English language is too weak a glass for the American; it cannot reveal to him the civilization of the world. Only when he learns to look through the compound lens of more than one great literature, will he discern in distinct outlines and in symmetrical form, what now, appears blurred or distorted to him. Then he will perceive the real purport of Schiller's criticism addressed to the English: "Sluggishly the thick blood flows in your veins. Pleasure is foreign to you, who know but frenzy." Then he will glean a profounder meaning from that beautiful inscription above the portal of the famous music hall in Leipzig: "True enjoyment is a matter of grave importance." Then the truth will dawn upon him that the Germans, in promoting music and song in this country, contributed infinitely more toward the suppression of vice than all our law and order societies ever did or ever will do. Brutality and excess of every kind come rushing in, like a replenishing ether, wherever a social vacuum occurs. To displace them effectively, we must secure a richer content for our inner national life. Our temperance and Sunday questions, along with many others of a similar nature, will sink into insignificance, the moment we learn to provide for the masses the proper forms of enjoyment, because a heart overflowing with genuine joy has no room for wickedness.

Let us hope that, that this nation may soon proclaim a second declaration of independence, that it may bid a friendly but final farewell to British insularity. Long enough we have tarried in the narrow English Channel. Let us lift our anchors and hoist our sail! 'Tis time to put to sea — in quest of our lost birthright, the golden fleece of the world's best thought.